

4 April 1960

Informal Comments - OX Cover  
(Plan #4 OXC 0661-60)

1. Use of the title "Flight Test Center for Advanced Propulsion Development" will cause much speculation and inquiry from ARDC headquarters and from the Propulsion Labs at WADD. The ARDC is set up to perform all Air Force flight test. The workload at all ARDC flight bases has been decreasing, and to establish a new base at this time might jeopardize the overall cover story. The term "Advanced Propulsion" not under the cognizance of the labs at WADD will cause much concern and investigation by the long established "empires."
2. The "advanced engine" would imply either rocket engines or nuclear engines. Rocket engines are being used daily at the missile sites and do not require such isolation. The alluding to a nuclear engine has been negated by the recent announcement by President Kennedy of canceling the nuclear engine program. Approximately four years ago, a complete survey of the western U.S. was made by the Air Force nuclear engine project office of WADD. It was decided that the only feasible location was the southern edge of the dry lake bed of Edwards AFB. The need for isolation for safety considerations does not reasonably apply. One nuclear engine has been tested by Convair under an Air Force contract. All installation, maintenance, and flight test was accomplished at the Convair plant at Ft. Worth, Texas. Other engines (ram jets, turbofans, etc.) do not require such isolation.
3. Do not use the term "pyrophoric fuel." Such a fuel is not feasible in an air breathing engine and most certainly would never be approved by FAA for commercial use. There is no established need for a secret fuel base since the visual sighting of any fuel does not compromise the chemical composition.
4. Alluding to the B-70 and X-15 programs does not seem prudent with the recent cut back by President Kennedy and the world wide press releases of X-15 results of an 'almost' unclassified program.
5. An aerial photograph of the base for a press release would probably reveal that the base is not one for fuel testing due to the lack of fuel storage facilities. The storage tanks will be few, large, and grouped. I would imagine such storage to be many, small, separated tanks.
6. No reference should be made to the use of non-metallic surfaces for high speed aircraft. Ablative techniques are required during some missile re-entries for heat dissipation and braking action of the increased drag. Such results are not the goals of high speed aircraft. The AF-12 will not have such plastic fillers and surfaces.

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7. When the announcement is made of the "X-19" and the movement is made to Edwards for Air Force testing, the need to keep the "Area" open has been lost. Further, as in paragraph 1, it will be almost impossible to explain why Edwards and qualified Air Force test pilots were not used in the first place.

8. The larger runway and larger lake bed at Edwards offer a more suitable test facility for all three concepts in the classified cover story. All previous manned experimental aircraft (including Navy programs) have been conducted there. The base will be used for the recovery of the Dyna Soar vehicles. The people in a position to require more knowledge than the general public probably will not accept such a story.

9. Two other points should be included in the cover plan or provided for in the future. The development of the airframe and engine is obviously an extremely expensive venture. The cost of the program is beyond company financed development. As such, an explanation must be made to justify the government action of single source procurement without prior bidding opportunities by the several aircraft companies capable of competing for the contract. Secondly, it does not seem plausible to explain such a large number of the same type of aircraft as experimental models. Generally, only one to three are produced. This large number of experimental aircraft, manufactured by Lockheed, tested in secrecy at Watertown, lead to the conclusion of a U-2 follow-on aircraft. The U-2 is still too much in the news to divorce the two. Due to past negotiations, the interested personnel at Convair, Ft. Worth, will know the overall situation.

10. It may be redundant to state that I believe the concept of the cover plan would be greatly enhanced if the entire operation were to be transferred now to Edwards AFB, California.

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